



The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

Women in politics Lithuania, 3-4 June 2025

Comments paper – Cyprus



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This publication is supported by the European Union Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (2021-2027).

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Women's political participation- Cyprus

Alexia Panayiotou

UNESCO Co-Chair on Gender Equality

University of Cyprus

Abstract

The discussion paper analyses women's political participation in Cyprus by reviewing the current situation. The data shows that Cyprus significantly lags behind other EU countries and, in some instances, is found in the last position of the EU 27. There are, therefore, significant challenges to achieving gender equality in politics, not only in regard to battling stereotypes and attitudes, but also in regard to possible legislative impediments. The paper discusses these hurdles and concludes with some initial policy recommendations.

1. Background

1.1 Context

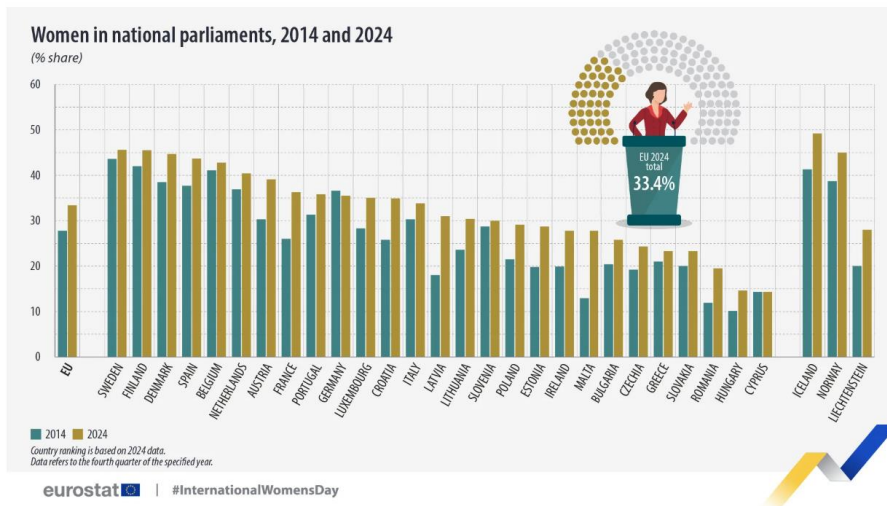
[Cyprus ranks 20th](#) in the Gender Equality Index, with a score of 60.9 out of 100, according to the 2024 European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE) data for the 27 EU Member States. Cyprus figures are 10.1 points below the average EU score (71.0). Since the 2023 edition, Cyprus' overall score increased by only 0.2 points, while registering a 0.4-point *decrease* in the domain of power, continuing the trend initiated in 2020. In fact, Cyprus' **lowest degree of gender equality is recorded in the area of power**, which covers participation in political, economic and social decision-making processes. Cyprus remains second to last in this domain with a score of 28.8, ranking right before Hungary, with the EU average at 61.4.

According to the relevant indicators, Cyprus has among the highest – and sometimes the highest – degree of gender inequality of the EU 27 in regard to representation in political and economic decision-making processes. The highest performance is recorded in the participation of women in the Council of Ministers, while their representation in the House of Representatives, in local administration, and on the boards of the largest companies listed on the Cyprus Stock Exchange is significantly low. While the focus of this paper is on political participation, some figures on economic participation are included in the Annex to showcase the wider situation.

In regard to female representation in national parliament, Cyprus is found **in the last position of all EU Member States**, as shown in the Eurostat figure below, with just 14.3% of MPs being women. Although the Speaker of the House of Representatives is currently a woman (Ms Annita Demetriou), Cyprus lags significantly behind other EU countries; it is very far from the EU average of 33.4% and countries in the top

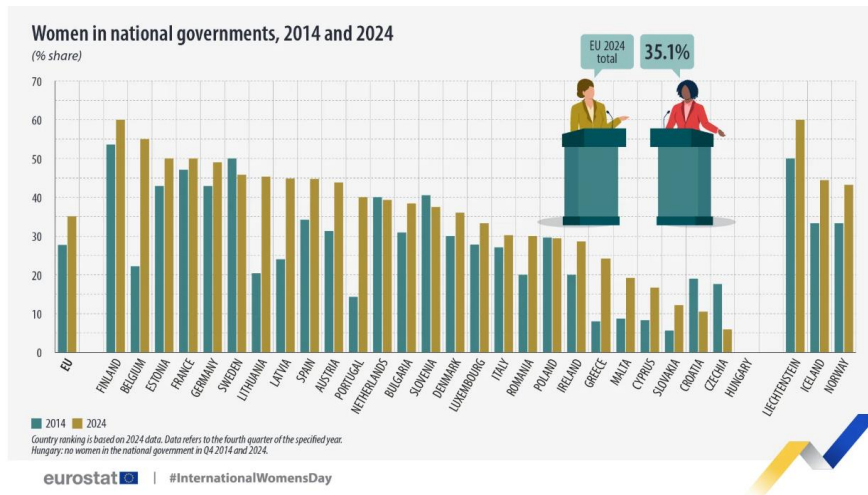
positions (Sweden has a 45.6% representation, Finland 45.5% and Denmark 44.7%). In addition, it is important to note that there has been **no increase since 2014**, as is clear from the figure below.

Figure 1: Percentage of women in EU national parliaments, 2014 and 2024



The situation in national government is not vastly different. The figure below, again from Eurostat, shows how Cyprus lags significantly below the EU average of 35.1% female representation. Cyprus is found in the bottom 5 positions. Unlike countries making progress in appointing women to ministerial roles (e.g. Belgium, Estonia and France which have 50% or more female representation), Cyprus remains far from achieving gender balance. There are only 2 women out of 11 Ministers in the current cabinet of President Nicos Christodoulides and 4 out of 7 Deputy Ministers. The Deputy Minister to the President (an additional post, separate from the heads of the 7 Deputy Ministries noted) is also a woman; however, it is important to note that, according to the Cyprus Constitution, only *Ministers* have voting power in the Cabinet.

Figure 2: Percentage of women in EU national governments, 2014 and 2024



According to [EIGE figures for 2024](#), Cyprus also has a representation problem in local municipalities. After the latest elections of 2024, women make up only 15% of the members of municipal councils. Of the 29 mayors (including nine in occupied municipalities and two in semi-occupied areas), only 3 are women, none in the largest municipalities of the island.

Perhaps the worst picture in regard to female representation is found in Cyprus' representatives to the European Parliament (EP). Cyprus only had 3 female MEPs¹ since the first elections of 2004. At present, **Cyprus has no female members serving as MEPs in its 6 positions** (2024-29).

1.2 Regulations and legal provisions

In the Republic of Cyprus, equality policies are determined to a significant extent by the legal framework and directives of the EU, but also on the basis of the provisions of international conventions. Main priorities are set by the National Strategy for Gender Equality (NSGE) 2024-26, which is drafted, coordinated, monitored and evaluated by the Office of the Commissioner for Gender Equality (OCGE).

Perhaps the most important recent development in gender equality actions for Cyprus is the formalization of the OCGE, through the "Commissioner for Gender Equality and Related Matters Law of 2024". The Law establishes the Office but also regulates the role of Gender Equality Officers (GEO) in Ministries and Deputy Ministries and defines their contribution in applying gender mainstreaming to public policies.

Another important development is the proposed legislation on gender mainstreaming.² This is considered a very progressive proposal as it introduces for the first time the concept of 'gender mainstreaming' in a legal document of the Republic. The proposed legislation applies to all facets of public life, including legislative initiatives, budgeting in Ministries, policies proposed, measures taken, the processes of public procurement, as well as any actions taken in regard to the fulfilment of the National Strategy on Gender Equality. In addition, the Law will also mandate the collection of gender disaggregated data at all levels of government and the wider public sector, a very important step for Cyprus.

It must be noted that, until recently, Cyprus' legislation covered many aspects of gender equality but not inclusion, which led to several issues that may have a direct impact on efforts to increase the number of women in political decision-making. One example is the [Supreme Court decision](#) arguing that the 2016 law voted for by parliament, introducing a quota of one third women in the boards of public

¹ Two female candidates were voted in 2009 and one filled a vacant MEP position in 2022 as a runner-up.

² This is the 'Gender Mainstreaming Law of 2024', which is currently at the Law Office of the Republic for the appropriate legal and technical evaluation, before its submission to the Cabinet of Ministers and then to Parliament. It has already been through extensive public consultation.

organisations, is unconstitutional. Thus, for Cyprus to harmonize with the new EU Gender Balance on Corporate Boards Directive (2022/2381), it will need to pass legislation the soonest.³

Other recent gender equality laws include the ‘Law on Combatting Sexism and Online Sexism’ of 2020. This law seeks to eradicate incidents involving sexism and gender stereotypes in Cypriot society, in order to establish a framework of security and equal opportunity between genders in education, the job market, professional development and promotion, as well as the advancement of women to more decision-making posts. Sexism, according to the [2020 law](#), consists of any public or private sexist behaviour against a person or group of persons, and includes any action, gesture, representation, practice, written or verbal communication based on the idea or belief a person or group of persons are inferior because of their gender.

2. Policy debate

The [NSGE](#) lays out 14 different priorities for the years 2024-26, the first of which is gender budgeting, which is seen to cut across all other foci. The other areas (such as gender and work, health, justice, etc.) correspond to the Ministries and Deputy Ministries of the Republic, which are made significant partners in implementing the strategy. Each of these priorities is broken down into specific actions, complete with timeframes and the institution/authority responsible for implementation. In regard to gender budgeting, support has been granted from the Technical Support Instrument (TSI) after a successful application to this EU programme by the Cyprus government. Implementation began in June 2024, with expertise provided by Expertise France.

Concerning the priority to improve gender equality in top decision-making posts, several actions have been planned or implemented by the OCGE, aiming both at increasing the number of female candidates (supply) *and* raising awareness among voters/decision-makers (demand). These include: a registry of Cypriot female politicians showcasing their accomplishments; a competition instigated in 2024 for high-school girls, titled ‘[What I would Change if I were a Minister/Deputy Minister for One Day](#)’, with the goal of inspiring young women to pursue political careers; and a statistical study of the extent of gender inequality in the top governmental posts and councils. CSOs are particularly active in this area. The Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies (MIGS), for example, has launched several initiatives and campaigns, as discussed below. However, there is limited debate on the part of political parties, which often hide behind ‘supply’ explanations—that it is difficult to find suitable female candidates for their party lists because of women’s lack of interest. Although the three largest parties claim internal gender equality policies for their candidate selection and that they voluntarily enforce a gender quota for their lists and internal governing

³ It must be noted here that Cyprus did not meet the deadline of December 2024 to do so.

bodies (alternating female/male candidates on their lists), this is not always upheld, especially in smaller municipalities. In addition, some GE policies are met with scepticism by both men and women, [for example, the strong resistance from AKEL](#) (with 22% of the seats in parliament) on measures that include quotas. ***A wide-scale study would shed light on demand vs supply explanations for the lack of women in top positions and is vital to making further policy recommendations.***

3. Good practice examples

The legal provisions outlined above are considered examples of good practice, as they are expected to enable policymakers, especially the OCGE, to actively intervene in cases of gender discrimination, including any actions on behalf of political parties.

The [National Action Plan \(NAP\)](#) on Women, Peace and Security (2021-25) which seeks to address the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, is an important effort in securing the participation of women in Cyprus' ongoing peace negotiations. So far, women have been completely absent from this process. The current effort by the OCGE to showcase the achievements of female politicians through [a national archive](#), as implemented in 2025, is also notable.

Several civil society initiatives are worth mentioning, as well. Especially notable is [Fem-Able](#), an EU-funded project undertaken by the Center for Social Innovation (CSI), which provided key findings in regard to both attitudes and perceptions, as well as the main obstacles, to women's greater political participation. The resulting toolkit is useful for educators, media specialists and policymakers. The Association Internationale pour la Promotion des Femmes d'Europe (AIPFE) offers a strong mentorship programme, while the Cyprus Women Bicomunal Coalition brings together Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot women to actively push for more egalitarian political participation. Several awareness raising campaigns were also run, most notably by MIGS (['Mehri to 100'](#)- 'Until 100' in 2021). The online platform initiated by MIGS in 2017 called [She Experts](#), was an easy-to-use database, searchable by expertise, which allowed any interested party to locate female experts. Even though the database was not sustained, it was a good initiative worth relaunching.

4. Transferability aspects

There are several lessons to be learned from the good practices of Lithuania and Belgium.

- Public awareness campaigns are crucial. Podcasts are currently being run both by MIGS and the OCGE, quite successfully, but perhaps a lengthier focus on women in leadership positions, showcasing female political leaders, would be a good idea as per the Lithuanian example. Specific reference to 'best practices' or strategies from other countries in the EU could be beneficial. Furthermore, the suggestion in the Belgium paper for 'testimonials' and 'role reversals' could be particularly effective as 'non-patronising' campaigns.

- Gender quotas are the most effective strategy for improving the number of women in politics. Given the Constitutional impediment noted, more awareness around this need must be raised, alongside the discussion of examples like Belgium. The triple quota system suggested in the discussion paper merits engagement with Cypriot policymakers, as well as understanding how the current system in effect discriminates against female candidates. Awareness needs to dismantle the common misperception that ‘quotas do favours to less qualified women’. Internal gender audits may also be encouraged for political parties.
- Combating political violence is also a key step in ensuring better participation. There is a plethora of examples of sexist, even misogynistic attacks both on female candidates and female MPs in Cyprus. So far, all of these have gone unpunished (including comments about the current Speaker that she is a ‘Barbie’ or ‘only fit for the catwalk’). The Belgian practice of disciplining MPs who commit assaults, with ‘penalties including a 10-week exclusion from parliament’ deserves a lengthier discussion for the Cyprus case.
- Peer support, in the form of mentoring, formal and informal, as well as specific trainings for *both selectors and candidates* (as the Belgian case) is also a potential good policy for Cyprus. The particular need to train selectors is emphasized.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

There are several take-aways from the current paper:

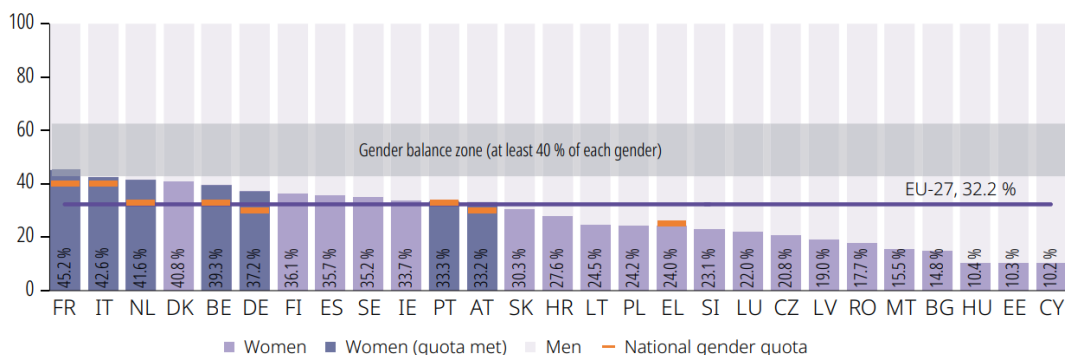
- The importance of focusing both on candidates and selectors must be highlighted. While many trainings are organised by NGOs, the OCGE within the new institutional role can mandate these trainings and/or hold political parties accountable for participating in these trainings. An ‘Academy’ can be created.
- Combating gender biases through campaigns in multiple forms (podcasts, leaflets, online toolkits, etc) is essential. [Several studies](#) have repeatedly shown that biases remain one of the main obstacles to enhancing female political participation. Sharing ‘role models’ and ‘best practices’ can enhance these efforts.
- Peer support among women politicians must be strengthened, ideally across party lines (as the Belgian suggestion). Creating a safe place for women, where misconduct is penalized and support is available, both as mentoring and as skills training, must be a priority.
- Other propositions, such as parties ‘signing a charter’ to combat sexism in politics (an act which can be undertaken by the OCGE), or parties taking the responsibility for lodging formal complaints on behalf of their members for any sexist attacks, are important and doable.
- In the context of Cyprus, the governmental funding that parties receive can be linked, positively or negatively, with the adoption of concrete GE measures.

ANNEX

Since political and economic power are often interdependent, the figure below may be useful. The economic sub-domain of power (as per EIGE data) is measured by the proportion of women and men on corporate boards of the largest nationally registered companies listed on stock exchanges and national Central banks. Here too the situation in Cyprus is highly imbalanced in favour of men. According to the latest EIGE and Eurostat figures: women make up only 9% of Directors on company boards (significantly lower than the EU average of 34%) and only 14% of the board members of the Cyprus Central Bank (EU average is 29%). There has never been a female Central Bank Governor since the 1960 independence of the country.

The figure below, which shows the latest EIGE country comparison in 2022, is indicative of Cyprus' place (last position) in regard to the [number of women on company boards](#):

Figure 3: Share of women and men on the boards of the largest listed companies (%), October 2022



Source: EIGE, Gender Statistics Database. National gender quota targets: FR and IT (40 %); BE, NL and PT (33 %); DE and AT (30 %); EL (25 %).